In this third of six tip sheets on the North Carolina Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS-R) and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R), we will look at the quality indicators for Listening & Talking/ Language & Reasoning and Interaction.

**Listening and Talking/Language & Reasoning**

**Informal Use of Language**
The informal use of language is a very important part of children's development. It is essential for families and caregivers to begin talking with children starting at birth. Responding quickly and consistently to the verbal and non-verbal signals that infants and toddlers share is a way to encourage oral language development. Caregivers should maintain eye contact with infants and toddlers while talking and respond verbally to their crying, gestures, sounds, words, and questions. Caregivers should also talk to each infant and toddler during play and personal care routines. For instance, when a teacher is diapering a child, she should explain what she is doing. During children's preschool years, adult-child conversations during free play and routines should occur often. Conversations provide opportunities to ask open-ended questions such as, “How do you think that works?” Doing so can encourage children to expand on their thoughts and ideas.

**Books and Pictures**
Books and pictures are a great way to enhance young children's language development, especially if children can experience many kinds of books on a daily basis. Experiences with books also expose children to the more formal language of print and help them with their developing knowledge of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Children should have access to a variety of books, including fantasy and fact, stories about people, animals, science and books that reflect different cultures and abilities. Story time should be an important part of your everyday activities. Teachers should be available to read books informally to a small group of children and encourage communication about the books. Other language development materials include posters, pictures, flannel board stories, picture card games, and recorded stories and songs.

**Encouraging Children to Communicate**
According to Lev Vygotsky, children should also communicate with their peers to develop appropriate social skills. Again, communication activities should take place during both free play and group times. For example, written communication can be encouraged through language experience stories. Children's words can be written as they share their thoughts about a field trip, a picture they have drawn, etc. (Through this expression, children will learn that their words can be written down and read.) Additionally, children should have access to a variety of materials that encourage language, such as play telephones, puppets, flannel board stories, dolls and dramatic play props, small figures and animals.

**Using Language to Develop Reasoning Skills**
An important component of the ECERS-R is the use of language to develop reasoning skills. The goal of this component is to help children process information about the world around them. To do this, provide materials that stimulate reasoning, including sequence cards, size and shape toys, sorting games and math and number games. Ask questions that will help children focus...
on objects and see their differences, such as finding differences in the blocks they are building with. The more children are encouraged to think for themselves, the more their reasoning skills will develop.

**Interaction**

**Supervision of Gross Motor Activities / General Supervision of Children**

Safety is a primary concern during gross motor activities, as this is when many children’s injuries occur. Therefore, children should be supervised and observed carefully so teachers are ready to intervene whenever safety is jeopardized. Teachers can also use information they get from observing and supervising to promote their children’s learning.

When supervising play areas, for example, consider the following:

- Are enough staff available and can they see all areas where children may be?
- Are positive staff-child interactions taking place? Are the teachers encouraging and assisting the children to develop skills needed to use play materials and equipment?
- Are staff involved with the children’s conversations and extending their ideas by asking open-ended questions or adding information to extend thinking related to their play?
- Do you see staff encouraging positive social interactions by setting up small group activities and helping children take turns and cooperate with each other?

Setting safety rules can make supervision more effective. Older children can even play an important role in creating them. Examples of simple safety rules include, “play away from the swing set” or “sand stays in the sandbox.”

**Discipline**

Helping children gain inner control is the most important goal of discipline. In a child care setting, discipline means guiding and directing children toward acceptable behavior. In doing so, the teacher must be clear, positive, and firm, starting with simple, clear rules and limits that children understand. It is also a good idea to involve children in establishing classroom rules, as children are more likely to respect rules when they help identify conflicts and problems that may arise. Children need opportunities to talk out problems, think of solutions, and make decisions.

Positive approaches to guiding behavior include:

- Planning ahead. Conflicts can be avoided by having duplicate toys accessible and providing smooth transitions.
- Being knowledgeable about the characteristics of different age groups and children. No single approach works for every child or every situation.
- Helping children use problem-solving skills.
- Acknowledging children’s feelings and sensitizing them to others’ feelings.
- Observing the environment and looking for reasons why a child is misbehaving.

**Staff-Child Interactions / Interactions Among Children**

Interactions are day-to-day experiences in which children and adults relate to each other and develop social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills. Adults who work with children must have a good understanding of how children learn. They must be able to respond to children as they explore materials, ask questions, and solve conflicts. Adults must also be able to meet the needs of each child. Responding to children’s needs consistently, promptly, and affectionately can ultimately help them learn to trust and can show them what it means to be in a caring relationship with another person.

A part of staff interaction is building relationships with children. Children learn to trust someone familiar who will care for them as they explore and who will comfort them when they are tired, upset, or frightened. Children’s social development is strengthened when they have secure relationships with their parents and teachers. It is also strengthened when they have many opportunities to play with other children. In fact, children who develop and maintain friendships are more likely to lead successful and productive lives as adults.

Here are some suggestions for building relationships with children:

- Plan time to get to know your children
- Meet the needs of individual children: work one on one with children
- Adapt daily routines to meet different needs
- Observe, listen, and respond to children
- Give children your full attention
- Show children respect by using caring words to let them know they are valued
- Create opportunities for children to make decisions, whenever possible
- Give children choices
- Be dependable

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